

WE CARE FOR MADRAS THAT IS CHENNAI

MADRAS

MUSINGS

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With prices soaring, all that I can afford now is to take pictures of the things I want to buy!

Does that include the building?

'Routine' once meant a happy stew of both individual and joint programmes. Not any more.

A typical day now means a vehicle filled to the brim with at least three generations, plus a few who 'need to be dropped'. The to-do list reads vegetables-shopping-family-visits-pick-up-repaired-cell-phone/test-results/child-from-coffee-shop-finish-brisk-walk-buy-wedding-gift ... and too bad if you are part of only one of these programmes.

With these fuel prices, independence is unaffordable.

Your vehicle is now the most high-maintenance 'thing' in the house - and you once thought it would be your teenagers.

And with cooking gas now on a luxury list, civilisation is certainly declining and falling all over the place.

Price tags are often far heavier to lift than the items themselves.

Yet, messages come at you from every direction: "Look, Everyday People, look at all the goodies out there...Buy, Buy, Buy..."

Exactly how fast are average people supposed to run, before they can catch up with this promised Life, this 'Arrived' list?

Money has lost its 'money-ness', or seems to be re-defining itself.

If the sky is the limit for soaring prices, we still have far to go. Meanwhile, the limitless sky is lowering heavy grey clouds on to the heads of hapless citizens.

Ranjitha Ashok

New Assembly complex raises many logistics issues

(By A Special Correspondent)

The design plans for the new State Assembly complex have been unveiled, but the plan raises not a few logistics issues which it will be well worth the Government's while to ponder over before work begins. The only entry and exit for vehicles, and this includes the high security convoys, will be near the intersection of Anna Salai and Sivananda Salai (Adam's Road). This is a very busy intersection, being an oft-used route for those wishing to access Central Station. Sivananda Salai is a narrow stretch with the river on one side and the MRTS going directly above it. It is also one of the last green stretches in the city. With Government vehicles having to frequently use this road and also Anna Salai, there are chances that traffic will be stopped whenever ministerial convoys use them. This will lead to an enormous pile-up of traffic. It must be borne in mind that in order to access Fort St George, the convoys at present use Beach Road, which sees less traffic and is also very broad. That not being the case in the new location, traffic bottlenecks are foreseen.

The PWD, never known to be proactive, has stated that it needs to study the relocation of bus-stops along Mount Road and Wallajah Road junction. The pedestrian entry to the Assembly complex will be along this intersection. If the bus-stops are to be moved away from here, it will mean pedestrians will have to walk much longer and, perhaps, cross the roads at all kinds of places, thereby making their journey more hazardous. It is strange

that the impact of placing the Secretariat/Assembly complex in the heart of the most important thoroughfare has not been studied as yet. It is only now that traffic experts have been called in. They will, therefore, have no option but to accept the site as a reality and work to (Continued on page 3)

Modern-Dravidian's the style

Some idea of the design for the new Assembly building complex scheme of the Government of Tamil Nadu has been published. The buildings, it appears, will be modernistic in look but will incorporate some Dravidian elements.

The original layout had five circular courtyards, with the main Assembly hall in the fourth. It has now been decided to have four courtyards only and the Assembly has been shifted to the second court. The Assembly Hall earlier had a dome whose design the powers-that-be did not particularly like. This has now been modified to resemble the *gopurams* of the *rathas* of Mahabalipuram. It is reliably learnt that all buildings will be of locally available granite and, hopefully, they will not be faced with the regulatory red granite that our PWD is so fond of.

The entire complex will be divided into two principal blocks, the first one being the Assembly and the second the Secretariat. There are reports that the second one will have around 20 storeys, making it one of the tallest buildings in the city. There will also be a Convention Centre in the complex.

City neglected as a tourism destination

Tourism is booming in Tamil Nadu, but why is Chennai not considered a sight-seeing destination? Why does it not compare with the other three metros all of which see tourists in large numbers spending time there? The reasons are not far to seek.

It is simply that Chennai and its significance as the birthplace of Modern India are not SOLD by the Tourism Department. This is done neither abroad nor on arrivals at railway stations or airports. This contrasts with many cities abroad and in India, like Mumbai, Delhi and Jaipur.

• The city has over 20 museums. Yet there are no booklets, etc. providing such information. Compare this with cities such as London or the success of small museums in India, such as the Raja Dinkar Kelkar Mu-

(Continued on page 2)

Record visitors, record earnings

There is good news on the tourism front in Tamil Nadu. The State set a new record by earning Rs 5,430 crore in 2007 from foreign tourists. This is roughly 80% higher than the amount earned the previous year. The number of foreigners who visited the State last year is given as 17,53,000, 31.3% more than the previous year. The increase in spend vis-à-vis the increase in numbers indicates that per tourist spend is on the increase in the State, which points to higher value added services. On the domestic tourist front too, the State has registered impressive figures. A whopping 506.47 lakh Indians from other States visited Tamil Nadu last year, which is an increase of 28% over the previous year.

There are some interesting statistics in terms of geographic spread of tourists as well. Internationally, Sri Lankans top the list when it comes to Tamil Nadu as a destination, with over 3.60 lakh arrivals last year. They are closely followed by visitors from Malaysia and Singapore. Visitors from the UK, USA and France also made a bee-

line to the State in impressive numbers. As for Indian States, neighbouring Andhra sent in the maximum number of 39 lakh visitors last year. Karnataka, Kerala, Maharashtra, West Bengal and Uttar Pradesh followed in that order.

The State Government is extremely pleased and is planning a slew of measures to improve amenities for visitors. A Rs. 5.5 crore package has been announced for Vellore, which is fast emerging as a tourist hub, the presence of the golden domed Sripuram temple being a major attraction. The Tourism Department has analysed and found that tourists are going in large numbers to Gangaikondacholapuram, Mahabalipuram, Thanjavur and the wildlife sanctuaries in the State. But what is striking is that Chennai is completely absent from the list. The city, while serving as an entry and exit point, is obviously not considered by most tourists as worthy of stay. This excludes those who come in as part of health tourism, in which case the city is an obvious destination.

Can sister cities get together on riverfront development?

We missed the news that on February 27, 2008, the Mayor of San Antonio (Texas, U.S.A.), Phil Hardberger, and Chennai's Mayor, M. Subramaniam, signed a Sister City agreement between the two cities.

San Antonio's Sister City agreement with Chennai is expected to lay the foundation for significant economic and cultural exchanges in such areas as commerce, health, education, and technology. This agreement with Chennai is San Antonio's 8th sister city relationship and the first and the only one they will have with India.

One of Mayor Hardberger's path-breaking initiatives, successfully completed during his tenure, has been extending the development of the 13-mile San Antonio River. Other noteworthy achievements include renovating the main plaza, purchasing a ranch and developing it into a park, and homeless rehabilitation in a sustainable way.

His curator wife, Linda Hardberger, has done wonders with their city museum and is hopeful of lending a helping hand to Chennai museums too! Hardberger is currently serving his second term as mayor in San Antonio. A noted adventurer, pilot, sailor and racecar driver, Mayor Hardberger has completed ascents of Mt. Rainier and Mt. Kilimanjaro.

Ranjini Manian, Editor, *At a Glance* and CEO, *Global Adjustments*, caught up with Mayor Phil Hardberger for a brief interaction and we are indebted to her for raising some questions with Mayor Hardberger that are pertinent to Chennai today. But one question we have for the Mayor is what has happened to the already existing sister cities' membership with Denver, Colorado.

What do you hope to do

with this agreement for Chennai?

We propose to initiate an exchange of students, physicians, cultural and art forms... the areas are vast. This declaration of friendship will be a two-way improvement for both our cities, attract investment, encourage business partnership and generally be an exchange of commerce, culture and education.

What will be one special immediate action?

We hope to be a single point of contact as a facilitating office to get rid of bureaucratic mush.

Please share your thoughts on the achievements during your mayorship.

I believe that public spaces knit a community together, and I have sought to rediscover San Antonio's historic beauty. Together with my able team, I led the charge to restore Main Plaza, the city's birthplace, as a stunning central gathering spot connecting city and county government, the San Fernando Cathedral and the San Antonio River.

What has been on top priority for you?

The San Antonio River, which attracted the city's first settlers to San Antonio, is a top priority for me. While the River Walk is a great attraction for both locals and tourists, I am determined to improve a full 13 miles of the San Antonio River to create hike and bike trails linking Brackenridge Park to Mission Espada and connecting the city from North to South.

Can't wait to do that walk with you, Mayor, and can't wait for Chennai's rivers to be cleaned up and made beautiful one day. There is hope for us all!

EDITOR'S NOTE: With San Antonio also looking at its riverfront, perhaps it could share ideas with those in Chennai who keep promising a green riverfront development of the Adyar.

Heritage by any other name

The longer *The Man from Madras Musings* lives, the more he is convinced that the heritage movement in Madras that is Chennai is blighted from the start, mainly because it lacks supernatural blessings. And what better way to get them than numerology? It is the in-thing now. MMM did not take it seriously till he received an invitation from an organisation calling itself the Artss Academy. MMM seriously thinks that *Madras Musings* must change its name to Chennai Chatter. After all who muses today? Everyone chatters – and continuously into cell phones, at that. This will be more in keeping with the trend.

Also Chennai Heritage itself could be spelt as Chennai Heritaje. MMM is told certain letters have more strength than others and 'j' is far more powerful compared to the mere 'g'. Phonetically it will not make a difference; after all, it could have been infinitely worse with options such as Chennnnai Herrritagge etc. Now for the buildings. *Ripon Building* could be *Ribbon Building*. If only *Government House* had been named *Goremment House*, its fate would or could have been a lot different. We could have *Chebap Palace*, *Merina Beach*, *Central Tesan* and so on. About Egmore, MMM is not all worried. After all, in its history it was named Elumuroo, Ezhumbur and so on. So a change to Egmore would not matter. MMM would request those who worry about heritaje, sorry heritage, to consider this.

Fly-by-night exhibits

Speaking about Elumuroo or Ezhumbur or Egmore, *The Man from Madras Musings* was away when the centenary of its station was celebrated. But he was happy to note that an exhibition of photographs about the building and the South Indian Railway, whose northern terminus it was, was put up. MMM was looking forward to returning and enjoying the display when he found that the exhibition was on only for a day.

In any other country, they would have dined out for a year on this, but here it is more a question of putting up some-

thing for the sake of doing it and then heaving a sigh of relief that it is all over and done with. MMM suspects that there must have been a budget for the event, which those in charge would have been eager to spend. Now that the expenditure has been incurred, all are happy. What does it matter if it was up for a day, an hour or even just a minute?

Agile and mobile

The Man from Madras Musings used to run for exercise. That was until a fall in a heritage building (of all places) put paid to some part of his spine identified by a letter such as C or L or S or some such. As a result of this, MMM is now only allowed a dignified walk. And as he walks along he looks about, always on the look-out for material to fill this column. And what amazes him is that times are changing.

There was a time when men took their dogs for walks. Now just about everyone takes his mobile phone for a walk. This realisation dawned on MMM when, one day, early in the morning, when it was not yet

**SHORT
'N'
SNAPPY**

bright, MMM was walking along a tree-lined avenue and espied a well-dressed if overweight man talking to himself as he walked on. He appeared to be arguing or even fighting with himself. Perhaps it was a struggle between the body and the immortal soul?

MMM is always a votary of safety first and, so, thinking that this man may be *non compos*, he decided to give him a wide berth. But the other gent was a swift walker and soon caught up with MMM, all the while yelling at himself. As MMM slowed down, wondering what could be offered by way of self-defence, he realised that the other was wearing a twinkling ornament over his ear which extended halfway down his cheek. This, MMM later came to learn, is the famed 'blue tooth', which is not the term for a tooth that has received an excessive dose of anaesthetic, but a gadget which provides you handless contact with your mobile. So you keep the mobile in your pocket, stick the blue tooth into your ear, answer all your calls and, hey presto! you look loony but your work gets done. These strollers are the highest in status. They appear to communicate with the clouds and most often have their heads in them.

Then there is the second variety of walker who has a complicated set of cables dangling all over. This one has not yet attained the status that the blue tooth-wearer has. Among the many cables, the first set be-

longs to an i-pod, which is a portable musical gadget that stores an awesome number of songs in it. Here again, there is subliminal sub-communalism, for, the man whose i-pod holds 53,259 songs looks down on the chap whose gadget has only 3245. Size matters.

To come back to the point, the i-pod is in, say, pocket A, with its wires firmly plugged to the ear. The mobile phone is in pocket B, with its own set of wires. Now as soon as the phone rings, or buzzes, or vibrates, or whatever else it can do, sometimes all of the above, the walker takes off the wires from the music gadget and plugs the phone wires in. All this is fraught with danger, for, the wire that is idle can trip you over and then, in addition to listening to the music, you can also see stars. There was a time when only your shoelace could do that, but then we live in dangerous times.

There is a third variety which is still getting used to the mobile phone. This kind believes that it has to roar every word into the instrument, thereby disturbing the public peace. There is a fourth variety which appears to have graduated from the old walkie-talkie. Walkers of this type keep switching the phone from ear to mouth. While speaking they bring it close to their mouths and while listening they press it to the ear. They barely stop short of barking "Over" at the end of every sentence.

One thing is common among all these types. There is very little walking done. Which is something that MMM gets done because he belongs to that rare breed that does not bring along a phone. But, then, most cannot be bothered with such outcasts, can they?

Zeal v Greed

There is news on the illegal building front. Apparently, those who have been served demolition notices after the High Court passed judgement have appealed using a new logic. They have accepted that their buildings violate all norms, but they claim that they are entitled to a one-time pardon, because their intention was not to violate but they were overcome by their zeal to do business which must not be mistaken for greed!

The Man from Madras Musings marvels at the brains that come up with such unique reasoning. He also wonders why, if the builders had become overzealous, the Corporation or the CMDA did not dampen their enthusiasm even during the planning stage by pointing out the violations. Were the authorities also motivated by the zeal to do business of some kind or the other? MMM hopes and prays that such gobbledygook will not be paid any heed to and that all violators will be brought to book.

– MMM

CITY NEGLECTED AS A TOURISM DESTINATION

(Continued from page 1)
seum in Pune and the Dolls' Museum in Calcutta.

- There is simply no street signage near any monument. Those not knowing much about the city have no chance of seeing places unless accompanied by an informed local resident.

- Most of the monuments and buildings are poorly maintained. To cite a few examples: the National Gallery has been closed for repairs for years, the *Senate House* is locked up, and most parts of Fort St George are

inaccessible. So what does that leave the tourist with? Temples, churches and mosques are the sole remaining choices and not many may want to have an itinerary dedicated to them. The beach may be the only attraction.

- There is no well organised guided tour of the city led by guides with a sense of history. Calcutta has one for 25 years now and is booked weeks in advance. Can Chennai not do something similar?

- The city is home now to a

long festive season beginning with music festival in November to the Chennai Sangamam in January. Can this not be marketed effectively? Two years ago, there was an announcement that a consultant had been called in by Government to submit a report on marketing The Season. But nothing seems to have happened.

There are many ways in which tourists can be made to stay and spend time in the city. But unless concerted efforts are taken, this will never happen.

**OUR
READERS
WRITE**



Regulations ignored

A notification published by the CMDA in 2001 read: Before buying property between East Coast Road and Sea Shore, please check whether:

- The site lies beyond 500 mts. from high tide line.
- The plot lies in an approved layout.
- The construction is as per the approved plan.
- Ask the seller to furnish approval details.
- Check the authenticity of the approval details in CMDA.
- You may also get written confirmation within a fortnight from CMDA.

Despite these warnings, a multi-storey building came up about four years ago within 500 metres of high-tide level on Thiruvanniyur beach. Thereafter, quite a few building complexes and houses have come up even within 200 metres, let alone the 500 metres stipulated by the authorities.

With such blatant violations of the prescribed regulations, how can we expect the authorities to be concerned about protecting the environment or conservation of heritage structures?

Srinivasan Pattoo
Founder-President
Wecare Foundation
Bayview Apartments
19/22, New Beach Road
Thiruvanniyur, Chennai 600 041

Across the table

The passing away of Dr. Alladi Ramakrishnan of

Ekamra Nivas in Mylapore has created another void in the field of intellectual researches in the disciplines of Science and Maths.

Dr. Ramakrishnan's yeoman service to create awareness of Science and Maths is laudable. He started the Maths-Science Institute in Madras that became a Deemed University and had helped many young persons eager to do researches to pursue their studies abroad.

A product of P.S. Higher Secondary School in Mylapore, he had given many lectures about Astronomy or Astro-Physics in his alma mater. One thing about his talks. He always interacted with the audience to learn what they felt about the presentation. Complex questions were debated by him with young or old across the table at P.S. Higher Secondary School's Science Club.

P.A. Ranganathan
16/24, Vedachala Garden
Mandaveli Street
Chennai 600 028

Possible dangers

With reference to Prof. Sanjeeva Raj's letter (MM, June 16th) on Ennore and Pulicat island, I totally endorse his views.

I have been familiar with Kaattupalli and other villages ever since 1965, when the senior Sankaracharya Sri Chandrasekharendra Saraswati camped at Kaattupalli for about

Logistics – and the new Assembly

(Continued from page 1)

towards changing the traffic flow, adopting a *post facto* approach, a solution that is always fraught with problems.

What the presence of a tall skyscraper, which is what the Secretariat promises to be, will do to the aesthetics of the area

is something no one seems concerned about. May Day Park, which has remained a sylvan oasis, will soon be run over by hangers-on and petitioners, always to be associated with any Government complex.

The original design as worked on by the architects

from Germany has undergone a number of changes, apparently with ideas being offered from the highest level. The designers had, it is whispered, incorporated in their original design *Government House*, *Gandhi Illam* and *Rajaji Hall*. But it was suggested to do away with the first two and only retain the third. And, so, *Rajaji Hall* has been left untouched. What everyone conveniently forgets is that two buildings, one of them among the oldest buildings in the city and the other a museum dedicated to the Mahatma, have been done away with.

A new question that now emerges is related to the future of *Rajaji Hall* itself. Till now it had been a convenient venue for meetings organised by those with limited budgets. Now, the building, practically shut off inside what will be a high security enclave, will be practically useless. And everyone knows what happens to heritage buildings that are not used regularly. Perhaps that is also part of a grand plan.

Chennai 'free to air' again

Chennai is looking brighter and cleaner, now that the skyline is no longer cluttered with advertisement hoardings.

Advertisement hoardings represent indiscriminate use of public spaces for private advertisement. Several of them are also structurally unsafe and unable to withstand weather onslaught. Also, the primary problem with hoardings is its fundamental purpose – to distract road users – and the larger the hoarding, the bigger the distraction.

It was for these reasons that CAG began its battle against hoardings in 1985, when CAG's trustees filed several PILs pointing out the threats posed by these hoardings to the people and the city. CAG's PILs also drew attention to the repeated cutting of trees by hoardings contractors to make the advertisement visible from all directions, and the unacceptable wastage of electricity for neon signs and hoardings that are lit brightly at night.

Over the long duration of this battle to protect public spaces, CAG photo-documented

hundreds of illegal hoardings on pavements, river banks, bridges, markets, schools and colleges and placed them before the Court. This included a 50+ hoarding list between the residence of the Chief Justice and the Madras High Court, and a 100+ hoarding list at the Anna Flyover junction in Chennai.

The 23-year stand of CAG that public spaces cannot be privatised by advertisers has finally been vindicated by a Supreme Court order which recognises the validity of CAG's long pending arguments for regulating hoardings to safeguard pedestrian, motorist and public safety.

The Supreme Court ruling has allowed several buildings of architectural splendour and several green and open spaces to reappear overnight. CAG welcomes this ruling on advertisement hoardings in Chennai and the consequent removal of several hundreds of hoardings around the city. (Courtesy: *Public Newsense*, the journal of the Citizen consumer and civic Action Group (CAG).

six months and described the island as resembling Kerala. The only mode of transport then was boat. The huge sand dunes, the thick vegetation with age-old trees, natural springs, pristine water and calm atmosphere were sights to cherish.

Such industries coming up so close to the city will only add to pollution and traffic in North Madras and the nearby villages. The most dangerous issue Government should consider is the catastrophe which could occur in a war – or by an extremist – using bombs. Such sensitive places like the Secretariat, RBI, Chennai port, numerous banks on Rajaji Salai, the factories at Tiruvottriyur, the Manali refinery, with a dozen polluting chemical companies including the Tamil Nadu Petroproducts

Ltd, the Ennore and North Chennai Thermal Power Station and the Ennore Port, would perish and the disaster would be 100 times that of the Bhopal tragedy.

I urge the Government to reconsider its decision and locate the ship-building industry or any other industry 200 km from Chennai. Let Kaatupalli be.

J. Chandrasekaran
50, Sullivan Garden Road
Mylapore, Chennai 600 004

Wasted pages

I am curious to know the reasons for publishing an account of "The Buchanan-Stanley Wedding in Madras" in the MM, May 16th. I am unable to understand what relevance it has today insofar as the readers of *Madras Musings* are concerned. In what way are they benefited by knowing about an event that had happened and was reported in *The Madras Mail* in April 1932!

The motto of *Madras Musings* is 'We care for Madras, that is Chennai'. This does not mean that MM should be publishing such articles concerning the Englishmen of that period. I am sure none would be interested and two valuable pages have been wasted and the valuable time of readers too.

T.M. Sundararaman
19, Nallappan Street
Mylapore, Chennai 600 004

EDITOR'S NOTE: The same argument could be used for much of the other material that appears in *Madras Musings*. Of what interest is it to readers of *Madras Musings* today to read of *Manikkodi* or Ramunni Menon or Sir Arthur Cotton or anyone else out of the past? We publish such pieces because they reflect how life was lived at one time and how things have changed. If a reader doesn't want to read such historic, nostalgic or old lifestyle material, he doesn't have to; we are not compelling him to waste his time doing so.

Pix for Madras Day

We plan to celebrate Madras Day 2008 with a photographic exhibition on the Buckingham Canal. Could readers help with photographs showing boats in the canal with goods, anywhere within Madras, and boats being pulled by two men on either side of the bank? Readers can also participate in an exhibition on Madras of the 1900s. We will welcome pictures of buildings, festivals, events, transports, attire including headgear, day-to-day matters, newspaper clippings and old books published in Madras, in short any thing of Madras in the 1900s.

If you want to participate, contact me by August 10th on mobile No. 98408 70172 or Raja Seetharaman at 98400 37001.

D. Hemchandra Rao

READABILITY PLEASE

Dear Readers,

As letters from readers increase, we are receiving more and more **hand written** letters, many of them in a hand so small and illegible or large and scrawled as to be unreadable. Often this leads to our discarding a letter, particularly if some part of it is unreadable.

If you wish us to consider your letter for publication, please type it with enough space between lines or write it using a medium hand, clearly dotting the 'i-s' and crossing the 't-s'.

Many readers also try to fill every square centimetre of a postcard space, making reading or editing impossible.

Please help us to consider your letters more favourably by making them more legible for us.

THE EDITOR

OUR ADDRESSES

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No personal visits or telephone calls, please. Letters received will be sent from these addresses every couple of days to the persons concerned and you will get an answer from them to your queries reasonably quickly. Strange as it may seem, if you adopt the 'snail mail' approach, we will be able to help you faster and disappoint you less.

THE EDITOR



(Current Affairs questions are from the period June 1st to 15th. Questions 11 to 20 pertain to Chennai and Tamil Nadu.)

1. Who was the Player of the Series in the inaugural Indian Premier League that concluded on June 1st?
2. Whose record did Rafael Nadal equal by winning his fourth straight men's singles title at the French Open tennis championship?
3. After five years of futile efforts to confirm sightings, which pinniped has been announced as officially extinct and becomes the only seal to vanish due to human causes?
4. What important decision happened on June 6th as regards the Democratic Party's chances in the American Presidential elections?
5. Apple's new mobile device unveiled recently is called...?
6. What record did IBM's 'Roadrunner' set in the world of computing recently?
7. Which 'new' European nation adopted 'Europe' as its National Anthem recently?
8. In which Asian capital city was the Global Summit of Women (GSW), informally called the "Davos for Women", held recently?
9. Why was a British Indian businessman, Virendra Rastogi, in the news for all the wrong reasons, recently?
10. Name the Indologist who was presented with the Padma Bhushan by the External Affairs Minister Pranab Mukherjee recently and who became the first Chinese to receive the honour.
* * *
11. Which place in Chennai has been referred to as 'VrundharaNyam' (beautiful garden) in Puranic scriptures?
12. Which temple in the State represents Chandrastalam (associated with the moon)?
13. What is the actual name of the entity commonly called 'Aavin'?
14. Tyche Life and Indian Soil are textile brands of...?
15. Which two districts border Pudukkottai District in the southwest?
16. Which Tamil hit was a remake of the Telugu *Okkadu*?
17. Which Tamil writer was awarded Sahitya Akademi award posthumously for his play *Pisiranthaiyar*?
18. Starting from Chennai Beach, which is the 10th MRTS station on the present route?
19. Who launched the 'All India Latchiya Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam' in 2004?
20. Who has written such religious works as *Hindu Maha Samudram*, *Mahabaratham Pesugirathu* and *Verukathagada Bramaniyam*?

(Answers on page 8)

The Narrow Road to the North

Here is a tip on gamesmanship. The next time some well-travelled friend goes on excitedly about an exotic country you have never visited, perhaps Austria or Uzbekistan, try this: Ask him which part of the country he spent most time in. If he says the North, then you say, "Ah, but, of course, you'd find the South is very different, wouldn't you?" And, of course, vice versa. You can enjoy seeing his jaw drop at your vast general knowledge!

The strange truth of the matter is that everywhere – the US, Britain, Italy, Germany, Spain, France, China – something fundamentally different separates life in the North from that in the South. This is true of cities too, as I discovered growing up in the North Madras suburb of Perambur.

The title of the piece is from a book of poems by the Japanese poet Basho, which applies also to what seems an undeservedly remote Northern corner of our city, because for most of its rulers and high society, it still remains an area of darkness, reached by narrow lanes. There, the dark satanic mills grind and belch out soot and smoke, the centuries-old roads are forever congested, and the poor toil and sweat for the Sahibs of the South!

To this day, many residents and visitors have little to do with anything that lies to the three sides, other than the front, of Central Station, the traditional entry point into the metropolis. What life is like beyond the railway junction, and Vyasarpadi or Perambur, which are technically much closer to the downtown area than, say, Besant Nagar, is a mystery to many. It is as if the southern direction of the map monopolised

all commerce, art, culture, media, civil administration, economic prosperity and public life in the city.

Yet this was not always so. To the North there was the business and commercial heartland till the 1960s; and in a much earlier era a place where the animals of the caravans entering the city used to be tethered, which is still known as Elephant Gate. Immediately adjacent to the station was an area of small, cheap lodges for the small traders and occasional visitors from the countryside to stay, and a maze of lanes and bustling alleys that generally went by the name of Sowcarpet, Mint or just "Town".



We publish this article written by S. Ramachander many years ago, as a tribute to his memory.

One of the oldest northern suburbs where a nucleus of the professional classes emerged is Perambur, defined by the massive presence of Binny's at one end and the Railway complex on the other and, much later, the factories of the 'Simpson' group.

The Buckingham & Carnatic Mills on the periphery was a huge hive of activity employing at its peak over 13,000 workers, which made it one of the largest employers and contributors to the local economy then. To the other side was the "joint" office of the MSM and SIR, the two original rail companies that merged seamlessly into the Southern Railway. The majestic Integral Coach Factory, a dream project of the new India, was ushered in to coincide with the Avadi Congress, to which I was taken as a

schoolboy, enjoying the pristine cleanliness of brand new ICF-built rail coaches, to describe which we added the exotic new word "vestibule" to our growing English vocabulary.

Schooling was a serious affair then for the new factory labour class who wanted their children to be better educated than they were. A few classmates of mine therefore were from semi-literate families who had a touching faith in the school as an institution and the teacher as the repository of wisdom and culture.

Many of our humble teachers of those days, it must be said to their credit, lived lives of quiet struggle, an honest existence from meagre salaries.

Few looked unkempt or sloppy in their dress, although it must have cost them a bit to maintain freshly laundered clothes all the time. Eking out the teacher's income with private tuition was such a rarity that neither the teacher nor the students cared to reveal the need for the extra help.

Land was available for the asking and at throwaway prices, but that didn't matter much anyway to people who had little to throw away. The genteel educated classes, compelled to live within an invisibly marked line of separation from the working class, were on an excruciatingly tight monthly budget exactly equal to the take home pay. All excursions, holidays, feasts and special purchases awaited the annual bonus from the factory!

Yet life was full of excitement, every Sunday being enlivened by the first division league cricket match played on the famous Railway grounds, one of the few home grounds owned by a club, patterned on minor county club grounds of England, with a tile-roofed pavilion with steps leading to the members' sitting area and a bar, a scorer's nook and a roller at one end of the verandah that propped up a manual scoreboard where was recorded the score at the fall of each wicket, end of an innings or in multiples of 10. There was no shortage of volunteers to do it more often, scurrying around the fence, but the stern eye of the scorer and his marker-assistant kept us at bay. A typical railway-style railing fence went right round the "library" grounds as it was called and the inner entrance gave on to a cream-tinted colonial building, all pillars and verandahs, housing the Anglo Indian Institute, the social centre of the community and venue of dances and parties. Quite why it was called the library building we never found out, but it was clear that this establishment stood in a different class from the other ground across the railway line on the less leafy side called the Southern Railway Indian Institute. In any event, their team was not of the same rank to us schoolboy spectators as they hadn't graduated to the first division.

The only other Sunday treat worth mentioning was the chance to have a few knocks around the boundary during the lunch interval and impress any of the adult player-heroes who deigned to look on, with the occasional rash pull or stylishly mimed late cut. When cricket was off, Sundays dragged on with no escape from homework, unless the morning show at a nearby cinema featured the rare *Tarzan* or *Laurel & Hardy* or *Abbott & Costello* films, as

(Continued on page 8)

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— The Editor

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The decline of *Manikkodi*

(Continued from
last fortnight)

Chitti wrote: "It was a rare privilege for me to have been welcomed into this gallery of distinguished writers. While I was not as dedicated a creative writer as the members of this gallery, I was interested in serious literature, though I began writing in lighter vein initially. I was more like the circus clown who parodies the feat of the strong man in the rings. On more than one occasion I was myself surprised to find that I had achieved some success in short story or essay." He added, "Ku. Pa. Rajagopalan, who passed away four years before Pudumaippiththan, had also left a rich legacy of lasting quality in his short stories. He revelled in dealing with human relationship, especially between man and woman, with a delicacy and tact befitting a diplomat. His portrayals of characters in embarrassing situations are like miniature paintings. His sense of form in the short story is evident in his choice of themes, which enables him to sketch in the essential details without resorting to interpretative incursions. He would create tension in the mind of the reader which is as intense as the suspense undergone by the characters. His famous story *Vidiyuma* is a case in point. . . Where Pudumaippiththan's voice is resounding, Rajagopalan's is a mild whisper. Both have attempted with great success to deal with what appeared in their day a controversial theme, namely sex. Rajagopalan may be said to have pioneered this departure from conventional themes. He succeeded more by understanding than by vivid description where he had to deal with repressed emotions and extra-marital excursions. Pudumaippiththan, on the other hand, pictured the nature of stark desire with astounding realism. Both steered clear of any tendency to titillate the reader. They had the balanced outlook resulting from their experience in handling a variety of themes, which helped them to distinguish between obscenity and sex, as well as between reportage and realism."

Then there were others who joined the rich tradition set up by these writers. and made the short story the vehicle of their self-expression, like C. S. Chellappa and Chidambaramaniam. The meticulous care with which the sentiments of Chellappa's characters were

delineated required him to be lavish with description and interpretation. He may have been, as a consequence, prone to indulge in excessive analysis of his characters, but owed his success to his narration of problems in the human situation. Chidambaramaniam, on the other hand, was steeped in the traditional culture of the country and bestowed great attention on the fundamentals of human existence. His style is as limpid as the flow of thought in his characters. Another writer, T. J. Ranganathan, believed in direct narration without recourse to extraneous devices.

Richard Stanton Kennedy, who undertook research on the Tamil short story, said in his Ph.D. thesis, "*Manikkodi* at this point was in a transitional stage between being primarily a political nationalist magazine and becoming the literary journal of

● by
K.R.A. NARASIAH

the latter half of the decade. In the early editions, Va. Raa. continued to write political essays while an occasional short story, often written by B. S. Ramaiah, the subsequent editor of *Manikkodi*, or a review of music appeared. What *Manikkodi* really was introducing to Tamil literature at this point was a new sense of criticism. . . The real contribution *Manikkodi* made at this stage was to introduce regular essays on topics of literary criticism. In the December 17, 1933 issue, Srinivasan began the weekly article 'Reporter Ramayanam' in which writers discussed the problems of literary criticism in the short story, novel and the *puranas*."

Prof. Brian Weinstein of Howard University observed in an article: "While Bharati was alive, a small group of wealthy Tamils, such as a police official, Krishnaswamy Iyer, and the Mandayam family in Madras, paid his printing costs. After his death, Va. Raa., a writer, critic and editor, publicised Bharati's style and form; Va. Ra. encouraged younger Tamil writers in the 1930s and 1940s to study Bharati and to resist the temptation to write in English. The main vehicle for his message was his literary review in *Manikkodi*. Like so many other avant-garde reviews, *Manikkodi* had a limited audience and a

small group of regular contributors, but it had considerable influence. Va. Raa., born a Brahmin, rejected the strictures of his class and caste; he and his contributors felt free to experiment with Tamil as well and they were inspired by Bharati. After the disappearance of *Manikkodi*, many of its regular contributors went to work with *Dinamani*, an important newspaper read by middle classes in Tamil land. Others went into other communications media such as the radio; they included P. G. Sundararajan (pen-name Chitti), an important critic, who wrote a book about Bharati and Tamil writing."

The days spent with Va. Raa. and *Manikkodi* were regarded as being part of the golden era by the group of writers who participated in the literary adventure. Meanwhile, the founder Srinivasan had to go to Bombay to look after the *Free Press Journal*. Srinivasan had asked Chokkalingam to look after the business side of *Manikkodi*. It was not much, as the magazine had a circulation of less than one thousand, but was sought after by many aspiring writers. Within a year of its existence, Va. Raa. was relieved of the editorial responsibilities by Chokkalingam under circumstances that sometimes plagued even the most distinguished movements in public life. The incident, which disturbed many writers like Chitti was never explained and the trio who began the journal never met to discuss it. It was obvious that clash of egos was at the bottom of the whole affair.

What V. Sundaram had to say during the Golden Jubilee year of *Manikkodi* sums up the short lived magazine's glory: "It is usual for critics and chroniclers of modern Tamil writing to refer to *Manikkodi* as the acknowledged mouthpiece of a Literary Renaissance in Tamil. *Manikkodi* was indeed an avant-garde journal, setting new trends, establishing new norms, proclaiming new values, destroying old customs, and upholding new ideas. Though it died within six years of its birth, it achieved its avowed mission of proclaiming to all the world that Tamil literature is a movement and not a condition; a journey and not a harbour."

Publication of *Manikkodi* started on September 17, 1933, and the journal folded in 1939. Though it existed less than six years, it had made an impact. While K. Srinivasan had made

A stormy petrel of journalism



journalism, which was to remain his forté.

Kuppaswami Srinivasan was born in Sirkazhi on May 30, 1899 and studied in Presidency College, Madras, where he completed his post-graduation. While he was pursuing his studies in law, C. Rajagopalachari invited him to serve on the staff of the National School that had been established when Mahatma Gandhi fired a nation's patriotism. But before long, Srinivasan drifted into

journalism, which was to remain his forté. He first joined the *Daily Express*, then *Swarajya* founded by T. Prakasam. He had a spell with *Tamilnadu* before he came under the adventurous influence of the legendary Sadanand who started the Free Press News Agency which, true to its name, strove always to be free in expression during an era of curtailed freedom. After working as the Agency's Central Assembly Correspondent in Delhi for a time, Srinivasan went to London to cover the proceedings of the Sankaran Nair Committee, which was set up by the Government of India to work in association with the much-hated Simon Commission on reforms to India. His work there for more than 18 months marked him out as a stormy searcher after the uncomfortable truth, and his capacity to discover things in the face of official resistance and unnecessary curbs soon attracted the attention of the entire journalistic world.

Returning to India at a time when the struggle for freedom was at its height, Srinivasan assumed the editorship of *The Free Press Journal*, the powerful mouthpiece of the Congress and which had been declared unlawful. When the publisher, Sadanand, was punished for an editorial by Srinivasan, the latter took the issue to the courts. Srinivasan's contention that the article was not illegal was upheld by the High Court. The restless spirit which was to possess Srinivasan later was first glimpsed when, soon after this incident, he left the journal and went to Benares to learn Sanskrit on the banks of the Ganga and assimilate the spiritual essence of Hinduism.

The call of the country, however, proved irresistible and Srinivasan soon returned to throw himself heart and soul into the freedom movement. He was responsible for the continued publication of the Congress' underground bulletin. He was rewarded with 15 months' imprisonment, which he spent in Nasik Jail!

K.R.A.N.

Va. Raa. (V. Ramaswami Iyengar) its editor, T.S. Chokkalingam, who was managing the business, had problems with Va. Raa. within a year.

When Va. Raa. was engaged in spreading the Congress message, touring the Coimbatore area, the *Manikkodi* issue dated October 21, 1934 carried this message: "It is published in the Press that *Manikkodi* editor Sri Ramaswami Iyengar spoke in many places. This is wrong statement. We wish to inform that there is no connection whatsoever between Sri Ramaswami Iyengar and *Manikkodi* - Editor".

In October 1934, Va. Raa. took over the editorship of *Veerakesari*, published from Colombo. T.S. Chokkalingam joined the *Dinamani*, as its Editor, and K. Srinivasan left for Bombay to assist Swaminath Sadanand again with his *Free Press Journal*.

In March 1935, B.S. Ramaiah took over as the Editor of *Manikkodi* and converted the weekly, which was being

published every Thursday, to a bi-monthly, mainly for short stories, with an occasional political essay thrown in. P. Ramaswami assumed charge of publishing. But a financial crisis made the publication to cease in 1939. The number of short stories written by star writers of that day in *Manikkodi*'s 46 issues was B.S. Ramaiah (20), N. Pichamurthy (11), Pudumaippithan (S. Vridhachalam) (17), Ku. Pa. Rajagopalan (6), Chitti (12), C.S. Chellappa (12), N. Chidambaramaniam (10), Mouni (8), T.J. Ranganathan (1), Sangu Subramanian (3), K.N. Subramaniam (Ka. Naa. Su.) (4), Ke. Raa. (17), P.M. Kannan (8), Sundha (Meenakshi Sundaram) (8), M. V. Venkatram (9).

(Concluded)

AUTHOR'S NOTE: All material culled from my *Sadharana Manithan*, a biography of Chitti P.G. Sundararajan, and from the blog *Chitti recollects* in the net sponsored by Korea N. Kannan.

Students to get lessons in Indian heritage

How many school- and college-goers know about the little historical monuments tucked away in their neighbourhood? Or, for that matter, about the rich literary and theatre traditions of India?

Blame this lack of knowledge on the "ill-effects of globalisation", says the Culture Ministry which is planning to teach young students about Indian culture and heritage, be it monuments, art forms or literature.

The Ministry has set up a Cultural Heritage Volunteers (CHV) scheme and submitted it to the Planning Commission this month (June), under which about 12,000 senior secondary schools and 5,000 colleges will be covered.

They will be trained on the lines of the National Cadet Corps, but in the field of culture, a Ministry official stated. The training would inculcate in students the ability to appreciate art and culture and will re-

sult in a tremendous growth of creativity in the various forms of art, he added.

Under the scheme, student volunteers will be trained by scholars, educationists and artists. The students would also be engaged in recording and documenting the most threatened forms of cultural heritage.

● by
KAVITA BAJELI-DATT

"There is a need to protect young people from marginalisation and neglect by ensuring their social inclusion and involvement in civic and cultural programmes," the Ministry said in its proposal.

"While looking at the present state of affairs or the prevailing conditions in India, it is seen that the ill-effects of globalisation are slowly and gradually killing the basic tenets of our cultural ethos."

The students are expected to pass on their knowledge to the community. The Ministry has recommended an outlay of Rs. 1 billion for the Eleventh Five Year Plan (2007-12) and Rs. 200 million for the annual plan 2007-2008.

Under the scheme, master trainers – either teachers, lecturers or university officials – will be selected who, in turn, will select 100 student volunteers.

This volunteer group will then be asked to develop a district cultural map on the rich heritage of their area. The heritage could include oral traditions, music, dance and theatre, social practices, rituals and festive events, practices regarding nature and traditional crafts.

They could also list sites that bear witness to multiple cultural identities, list deteriorating monuments, artefacts, books, manuscripts and historical objects. – (Courtesy: *Hindustan Times*)

Synes of the Tymes

At a hotel: 'Help! We need inn-experienced people.'
On a butcher's window: 'Pleased to meat you.'
On a roller coaster: 'Watch your head.'
On a drycleaner's window: 'Drop your pants here.'
On a parking space at a garden nursery: 'Reserved for plant manager.'
At an auto repair shop: 'May we have the next dents?'
At a New England church: 'Will the last person to leave please see that the perpetual light is extinguished?'
At a shoestore: 'Come in and have a fit.'
In front of a carwash: 'If you can't read this, it is time to wash your car.'
At a cocktail lounge, Norway: 'Ladies are requested not to have children in the bar.'
At a Budapest zoo: 'Please do not feed the animals. If you have any suitable food, give it to the guard on duty.'
Doctor's office, Rome: 'Specialist in women and other diseases'.
Information booklet about using a hotel air-conditioner, Japan: 'Cools and heats: If you want condition of warm air in your room, please control yourself.'
At a Nairobi restaurant: 'Customers who find our waitresses rude Ought to see the Manager'.
On the grounds of a Nairobi public school: 'No trespassing without permission'.
At a Mumbai restaurant: 'Open seven days a week and weekends too'.
At a Tokyo bar: 'Special cocktails for the ladies with nuts'.
At a Moscow restaurant lobby near a Russian Orthodox monastery: 'You are welcome to visit the cemetery where famous Russian and Soviet composers, artists, and writers are buried daily except Thursdays'.

– Collected by T.M. Sundararaman

THE NARROW ROAD TO THE NORTH

(Continued from page 6)

jungle lore or harmless slapstick were the strict parental limits of our permissible recreation. Tickets cost half a rupee, and a few more paise brought us fresh, roasted, spicy groundnuts wrapped in old newspaper.

Train spotting, which cost nothing at all, was another natural occupation in this area; and we could tell the time by

the whistle of the train on most days, starting with the earliest Mail trains that came tearing past the sleeping suburb just before dawn. We only felt any sense of being a part of the rest of the city when we went on very rare visits to cousins on the other side or saw off a visiting uncle at Central Station, both of which were treats likely to be

called off at a moment's notice as punishment for an instance of routine mischief getting out of hand.

Adyar, of course, was land's end then and Guindy a village where some of the electric trains used to terminate during off peak, presumably due to obvious lack of customers for their services beyond that point. (Courtesy: *Business Line*)

Answers to Quiz

1. Shane Watson; 2. Bjorn Borg; 3. Caribbean Monk Seal; 4. Senator Hillary Clinton formally ended her presidential campaign and endorsed support to Barack Obama; 5. Apple iPhone 3G; 6. It became the world's fastest computer and is designed for a peak performance of 1.7 petaflops; 7. Kosovo; 8. Hanoi; 9. He was given a 9½ year jail sentence after being found guilty of defrauding some 20 banks of more than £350 million in one of the biggest frauds in recent banking history; 10. Ji Xianlin.

* * *

11. Tiruvallikeni or Triplicane; 12. Tingaloor Kailasnathar; 13. Tamil Nadu Co-operative Milk Producers' Federation Limited; 14. Lakshmi Mills; 15. Ramanathapuram and Sivaganga Districts; 16. Ghilli; 17. Bharatidasan; 18. Greenway's Road; 19. T. Rajendar; 20. 'Cho' S. Ramaswamy.

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